HOW THE JAPS FISH.

CATCHING THE FINNY TRIBE BY MEANS OF TRAINED COMORANTS.

A Trip Up the River in the Korjo Marn, a Pleasant but a Queer Craft—Great Skill Required in Handling the Big Birds—A Sport That Is Exciting.

Gifu is the place to go to if you care to see in all its perfection one of the oldest extant forms of piscatory craft. To see the fishing at all you must be there between May and October, which are the limits of the season. To see it to full advantage you should choose a time when the river is free from turbidity and when there is no moonlight—the darker the night the better. Further, if you are wise, you will take care to see it after the manner of the country and in the company of a pleasant party of Japanese. That is how I saw it, and what I saw I now proceed to tell.

It was but a short drive from our inn at Gifu to the riverside tea house that served as the real starting point of the expedition. Embarking there after nightfall in a roomy pleasure barge, we set off on an up stream voyage, in which our craft was alternately poled and towed over the shoals and rapids of the wide and shallow Nagaragawa. Outside the night was darkness itself and profoundly still.

THE PARAPHERNALIA.

After perhaps an hour of struggle up stream the barge is brought to rest at a convenient place in mid channel, there to await the arrival of the cormorant fishers we have come to see.

Presently the first sign is detected—a spot of hazy red glow, shining over the trees from a reach two or three miles above us. Hereupon our chief boatman erects his private signal—a mighty paper lantern of a red and white basket pattern. Steadily the glow spreads and deepens until, as the last intervening point is cleared, we descry its cause—a constellation of shifting, flickering lights, drifting down the dark river toward us. By degrees these develop into balls of fire, seven in number, casting as many long coruscations of light before them from their reflection in the waters of the stream. The fires we now see are great cages of blazing pine knots suspended over the bow of each boat, darting forth flames and sparks, and forever dropping embers, which fall with loud hissing into the stream. Nearer still they come. The men have seen our signal and are maneuvering so as to surround us, which being done, we find ourselves in the midst of all the uproar and excitement of cormorant fishing a la Japonaise.

Now to describe the sport. There are, to begin with, four men in each of the seven boats, one of whom, at the stern, has no duty but that of managing his craft. In the bow stands the master, distinguished by the peculiar hat of his rank and handling no fewer than twelve trained birds with the surpassing skill and coolness that have earned for the sportsmen of Gifu their unrivaled preeminence. Amidships is another fisher, of the second grade, who handles four birds only. Between them is the fourth man, called kako, from the bamboo striking instrument of that name, with which he makes the clatter necessary for keeping the birds up to their work. He also encourages them by shouts and cries, looks after spare apparatus, etc., and is ready to give aid if required.

Each cormorant wears at the base of its neck a metal ring, drawn tight enough to prevent marketable fish from passing below it, but at the same time loose enough, for it is never removed, to admit the smaller prey, which serves as food. Round the body is a cord, having attached to it at the middle of the back a short strip of stiffish whalebone, by which the great, awkward bird may be conveniently lowered into the water or lifted out when at work; and to this whalebone is looped a thin rein of spruce fiber, twelve feet long, and so far wanting in pliancy as to minimize the chances of entanglement.

THE FISHING.

When the fishing ground is reached the master lowers his twelve birds one by one into the stream, and gathers their reins into his left hand, manipulating the latter thereafter as occasion requires; No. 2 does the same with his four birds; the kako starts in with his volleys of noise, and forthwith the cormorants set to at their work in the heartiest and jolliest way, diving and ducking with wonderful swiftness as the astonished fish come flocking toward the blaze of light. The master is now the busiest of men. He must handle his twelve strings so deftly that, let the birds dash hither and thither as they will, there shall be no impediment of fouling. He must have his eyes everywhere and his hands following his eyes. Specially must he watch for the moment when any of his flock is gorged—a fact generally made known by the bird itself, which then swims about in a foolish, helpless way, with its head and swollen neck erect. Thereupon the master, shortening in on that bird, lifts it aboard, forces its bill open with his left hand, which still holds the rest of the lines, squeezes out the fish with his right, and starts the creature out on a fresh foray—all this with such admirable dexterity and quickness that the eleven birds still bustling about have scarce time to get things into a tangle, and in another moment the team is again perfectly in hand.

As for the cormorants, they are trained when quite young, being caught in winter with bird lime on the coasts of the neighboring Owari gulf, at their first immigration southward from the summer haunts of the species on the northern seaboard of Japan. Once trained they work well up to 15, often up to 19 or 20 years of age; and, though their keep in winter bears hardly on the masters, they are very precious and profitable hunters during the five months season and well deserve the great care that is lavished upon them. From four to eight good sized fish, for example, is the fair result of a single excursion for one bird, which corresponds with an average of about 150 fish per cormorant per hour, or 450 for the three hours occupied drifting down the whole course. Every bird in a flock has and knows its number; and one of the funniest things about them is the quick witted jealousy with which they invariably insist, by all that cormorant language and pantomimic protest can do, on due observance of the recognized rights belonging to their individual numbers. No. 1, or "Ichi," is the doyen of the corps, the senior in years as well as rank.

But all this while we have been drifting down, with the boats about us, to the lower end of the course, and are again abreast of Gifu, where the whole squadron is beached. As each cormorant is now taken out of the water the master can tell by its weight whether it has secured enough supper while engaged in the hunt; failing which, he makes the deficiency good by feeding it with the inferior fish of the catch. At length all are ranged in their due order, facing outward on the gunwale of each boat. And the sight of that array of great ungainly sea birds—shaking themselves, flapping their wings, gawgawing, making their toilets, clearing their throats, looking about them with a stare of stupid solemnity, and now and then indulging in old maidish tiffs with their neighbors—is quite the strangest of its class I have ever seen.—Tokio Letter in London Times.

THE WICKED FLEA.

How He Bites and Makes Miserable the European Traveler.

Almost everybody likes to travel for the purpose of seeing new and strange sights. At least almost every person thinks he would like to visit places he has never seen. He does not know whether he would like it or not until he has tried it.

Almost everybody I meet would like to go to Europe, and this is especially true of young people. The imagination works up a very lively programme, which is filled up with unalloyed pleasure. No allowance is made for any miscarriages, none for great fatigue, none for the lack of accustomed comforts and luxuries, none for unexpected set backs and difficulties.

The average small boy or girl would say that he preferred three meals a day for a week of very sweet cake to the same number of repasts of oatmeal porridge; but he would change his mind before the week was out. When I went out to ride in the country around Constantinople a big flock of quails was always flying ahead of the carriage, and the Palace of the Sweet Waters seemed to be in a cloud of these birds. At the hotel it was quail at every meal till I hated the sight of them; and since that I have never cared to eat them.

I do not intend to give a list of the annoyances one encounters in foreign travel. It may seem incredible to my young friends that so insignificant an insect as the wicked flea can seriously interfere with so grand an achievement as a tour abroad. I do not imagine that I have suffered more than the average traveler in Spain, Italy and some other countries, though my skin may be thinner than that of most of them; but I look upon the flea as I have seen him magnified on a white surface by the lenses of the scientist.

To me he is bigger than an elephant, and it seems as though the bite of a crocodile would be pleasant compared with that of the bloodthirsty insect. This monster has not only kept me awake all night when I needed sleep, but he has made me writhe and squirm all day. I really believe the fleas in Italy and Spain are more to be dreaded than the banditti of those countries.

Spain and Italy are not alone in subjecting the traveler to the torture of the wicked flea. Even in the far north, where ice and snow dominate the year, the festive flea has a residence. One night I went to bed, tired out after a hard day's work, sight seeing, in a hotel in Christiania, in Norway. I soon found that I could not go to sleep, sleepy as I was. I thought I had an attack of hives or rash, or that I had captured the itch in some steamer or hotel.

I lay in torment till I heard a clock strike the midnight hour. Then I became desperate and leaped from the bed. I lighted my two candles, determined to ascertain what the matter was. I could find nothing on my skin that looked like scabies, and then with a candle in each hand I examined the bed. It was swarming with a very large sized, blue-black flea; and I had learned by experience that this sort was particularly wicked.

I took my corn broom and brushed them out of the bed and tried again to sleep, expecting to have my bones picked clean before morning, though I was to be called at 5 to take a steamer. I struggled in vain for another hour, and then got up again. I brushed the monsters all out again, and this time I was careful that no part of the bed clothes should drop down to the floor. This succeeded. At any rate, I was so exhausted that at last I went to sleep.

I was called in two hours; and in what condition was I to appreciate the scenery of the Christiania Fjiord? As soon as the steamer was in the Skager Rack I went to sleep. That night I had my battle and defeat at the teeth of the red armored knights of my berth in a hutte.

In Holland one night I was bitten one million times by another kind of flea, hardly less wicked. I did not count them, but I estimated them. Walking through the Circus of Maxentius, in Rome, I smelled pennyroyal. I had heard that this herb was an antidote for the wicked flea, as it is for black flies and mosquitoes. I gathered a considerable quantity of it; but I did not actually suffer from the depredations of the terrible monster in Italy.

In Burgos, in Spain, after looking over the magnificent cathedral and glancing at the bones of the Cid and his wife, our party of three took a carriage at the hotel to visit the tomb of the Cid, six or seven miles from the city. The vehicle was a tumble down old hack. A kind of cloth with a nap to it had been used to piece out the worn out lining. I wore long boots, and in a few minutes the armies of the wicked flea began to attack me by making an advance on my legs.

There was no road to the convent that contains the tomb, and the old carriage bounced over rocks, sometimes a foot high, and we were pitched from one side to the other of the interior and into the laps of each other. We laughed at the bumps we got and should have had a lively time of it if the fleas had not spoiled all the fun. We writhed and squirmed as though we were bitten by snakes. In spite of his prowess and the supernatural aid he received in his mighty victories, I doubt if the Cid Campeador could have conquered the army that beset our party.

Twisting about and pirouetting like a French dancing master, I looked at the tomb, but I did not take much interest in it. At the hotel I brushed the fleas out of the inside of my clothes and applied cologne to the skin, and it was very refreshing. Then I put an abundance of pennyroyal in my garments. I was all right till I took in a new stock in Madrid. They worried and tortured my companions and myself beyond endurance. I obtained a bottle of flea powder at the capital, which was of some service, but I still regard the wicked fleas as one of the scourges of travel.—Oliver Optic in Philadelphia Times.

New York's Riders.

Thirty years ago there was one riding school in the city and not more than 200 regular riders, of which the large majority were men. Now there are six public and one private school with 2,000 or more trained saddle horses and between 4,000 and 5,000 riders, with a large average of ladies among the pupils, and a galaxy of counts and barons and gracious, courteous gentlemen from Europe as riding masters—New York Sun.

AN ARAB SAYING.

Remember, three things come not back:
The arrow sent upon its track—
It will not swerve, it will not stay
Its speed; it flies to wound or slay.

The spoken word, so soon forgot
By thee; but it has perished not:
In other hearts 'tis living still,
And doing work for good or ill.

And the lost opportunity
That cometh back no more to thee.
In vain thou weepest, in vain dost yearn,
Those three will never more return.
—Constantina E. Brooks in Century.

An Uncommon Royal Spectacle.

Apropos of grand dukes, it may be interesting to state that the czar has recently given the rare spectacle of an autocratic sovereign freely renouncing some of his privileges and reducing the amount of moneys attributed to members of his family out of the state budget. The empress, who received annually 600,000 rubles—a ruble is nearly equal to eighty cents—will get only 200,000 hereafter, and in case of widowhood her dowry will be reduced by one-half, if she resides outside of Russia. Instead of 300,000 rubles, the czarowitz will have only 100,000; and his wife 50,000 instead of 150,000, as now. On her husband's death she would get a pension of 100,000 rubles instead of 300,000, if she resides within the empire, and only 50,000 in case of her residing abroad. The grand dukes, brothers of the reigning czar, who received 100,000 rubles as a pension until now, will get no more than 33,000. The daughters and granddaughters of the emperor will receive from the state a dot of 1,000,000, and nothing more. Each son of the czar will get at his majority appanages bringing a determined income and 1,000,000 rubles toward the building and furnishing of a palace. Similar reductions have been ordered by the czar in regard to money appropriations made to other members of the imperial family.—New York Tribune.

The Brakeman's Loss.

There is danger that the modern passenger brakeman will die of ennui. On the Fort Wayne road there is now in process of testing a device which is to be operated by compressed air from the engineer's cab, and which is, in effect, a noiseless annunciator, quietly informing the passengers, through their eyes, not their ears, of the name of the next stopping place. This, if generally adopted, will rob the brakeman of the dear joy of shouting in an unknown tongue. One by one this official's duties have passed away. A decade ago he twisted the hand brake as vigorously, and oftener, than did his co-worker on the freight train. Air and the engineer now perform that arduous duty. Now comes the silent, air operated station annunciator. There are a few privileges, however, left to the passenger brakeman, which the man in the engine cannot take away. There are pretty girls to help on and off, fat women, babies, old men and packages unnumbered to look after. But the vocal training of the brakeman will be totally neglected, and he will at times sigh for the days when he could relieve his feelings by splitting some passenger's ear drum and emitting a language that Max Muller himself could not interpret.—Pittsburg Bulletin.

But It Sounded Well.

Cheerlboy—Hello, old man! Where have you been for six months?

Seedlman—Well—I've been—in the lighthouse service.

C.—Ah! a most honorable job.

S.—Thanks. But, you see, I've been manager for a barn storming dramatic company.—Pittsburg Bulletin.